

The Centre Street United Methodist Church
Centre and Main Streets
Nantucket
Nantucket County
Massachusetts

HABS No. MASS-1007

HABS
MASS
10-NANT
74-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

THE CENTRE STREET UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

HABS
MASS
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74-

Location: Centre and Main Streets
Nantucket, Massachusetts

Present Owner: The Centre Street United Methodist Church

Present Occupant: Same

Present Use: As a Methodist Church

Brief Statement of Significance: A visual and social landmark, this Church contains some original elements despite later alterations, and reflects the changing tastes in nineteenth century ecclesiastical architecture.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: In 1733 Jethro Starbuck gave the land on which the Church now stands to his son-in-law, Richard Mitchell, who built a house there. His son, Peleg Mitchell, in 1822 sold the property to the leading Methodist of Nantucket, Dr. Oliver C. Bartlett and the Church was built there in 1823, at which time ownership was turned over to the Trustees: John Jenkins, Perez Jenkins, Solomon Folger, Nathaniel Rand, Jonathan Smith, Walter Cure, Frederick Worth, and William Jenkins.
2. Date of erection: 1823
3. Architect: Not known
4. Original plans, construction, etc.: No plans known. The house originally on the site was torn down when the land was purchased and "The Chapel", as it was then called, was built in 1823 at a cost of \$14,000. It had a hip roof that still exists underneath the 1840 roof.
5. Alterations and additions: Extensive improvements were made in 1840, the high pulpit standing in the front or east end of the Church was removed to the rear, west end, where it now stands and the pews turned to face it. The portico was added and the roof line changed from a hip roof to a gable roof to comply with the classic pediment which was added above the columns.

During the summer of 1949 the Church observed its 150th anniversary and for this occasion extensive improvements were made. The entire interior of the sanctuary was redecorated and new carpeting was laid. The second floor room at the east end of the Church was also repainted.

In 1969, a new basement was excavated and finished.

- B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure: Methodism on Nantucket traces its origin to 1796. Jesse Lee, a great pioneering Methodist, came to the island in April, 1797, and preached sixteen sermons in eighteen days. The following year the Reverend Joseph Snelling came from Martha's Vineyard and, for lack of a sufficiently large room, held open air meetings on Mill Hill. Many were converted. The Reverend Mr. Snelling was followed by Reverend William Beauchamp who organized the first Methodist Society in 1799, with nineteen charter members. Several months later, on January 1st, 1800, he dedicated the first Methodist Episcopal Church on Fair Street. This Church was called the Teaser Church, because the flag of the sloop Teaser flew over it during its dedication. In 1823, increasing membership had made the need of a new building imperative, and the present Church was erected on Centre Street, with the sanctuary seating 1,000 persons. The society was once one of the largest in southeastern Massachusetts.

The Appleton Pipe Organ in the Church is one of five known organs by that maker in use today. It was built in 1831 or 1832 and purchased in 1859 by the Church Aid Society and the Wesleyan Society, who still own it. (See deed in Registry of Deeds, Nantucket, Massachusetts)

- C. Sources of Information:

Bulletin of The Centre Street United Methodist Church.

Fowlkes, George Allen. A Mirror of Nantucket 1681-1850.
New Jersey, 1959. (includes photograph)

Hussey, R. B. Nantucket in a Nutshell. Nantucket: Inquirer and Mirror Steam Press, 1889.

Ancient Buildings of Nantucket. Nantucket: Nantucket Historical Association Bulletin, 1906, Vol. 2, No. 5.

Starbuck, Alexander. The History of Nantucket. Boston: C. E. Goodspeed and Co., 1924. (includes old photograph)

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This building was a typical nineteenth century church, built in 1823, but extensively modified in 1840 with changes in roof structure, addition of a Creek Revival portico and ornament, and changes in seating and decoration, modified again in 1949 and 1969. Characteristic features include a gable roof and portico, flush wood siding and shingle exterior, and projecting plank window frames.
2. Condition of fabric: Excellent; modifications include new stairways, decoration of chancel and balcony fascia and spaces, extensive addition of basement spaces.

B. Description of the Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: 64'-0" by 86'-9" including portico.
2. Foundations: Brick foundation walls above grade, irregular rubble below grade on subsurface clay, modern concrete block piers.
3. Wall construction: Wood frame, flush siding 5"-7" exposure east elevation; wood shingles, weathered grey 5" exposure, paneled pilasters and corner boards with beaded edges at all corners; all trim painted white.
4. Structural system: Post and lintel, six bays in 77'-0" dimension, girt at balcony level; 10" by 12" by 60' hewn beams, 10" by 12" sleepers below balcony level, 3" by 6" joists; mortise and tenon joinery; modern wide flange beams first floor framing; roof trusses.
5. Chimney: One 8" by 12" flue, brick chimney, second chimney at west end of garret of old roof only, bearing on sleepers between trusses.
6. Portico: Portico at Centre Street elevation: pedestals are of brick; each pedestal cap varies, made of wood, flagstone, brown sandstone or concrete; column base composed of two tori separated by a scotia; six hollow wood cylindrical columns constructed of laminated 2" wood strips, entasis employed to correct optical illusion; vernacular Ionic wood capitals; architrave of stepped fascias and progression of talon moldings and flush frieze; cornice of talon molding, dentil course and boxed eave.

7. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors:

- 1.) Front (Centre Street) doorways: Carpenter classic trim with plinth blocks, brown stone sills; central doorway has two out-swinging six panel doors, wood stoop; each side door (Centre Street) has one in-swinging nine-panel door (door at northeast is fixed shut, blocked by modern stairway).
- 2.) Doorways at southwest and northwest: New, of no importance; doorway into foundation wall provides access from Rose Lane to new basement spaces.
- 3.) Doorway into space below portico porch on Rose Lane: Vertical beaded edge boards, diagonal glass pane insert.

- b. Windows: Twelve-over-twelve single hung windows, 11" by 15" panes of irregular glass, mortise and tenon plank frame, dowel fasteners, atiles let into sill and head, stepped cornice cap; interior shutters, three sheaths per opening with center sheath divided at midpoint and operating, side sheaths fixed shut; some modern windows in north facade of foundation wall for basement space.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape and covering: Gable roof, asphalt shingle covering over sheathing, 3" by 5" rafters bearing on studs at 10' - 0" o.c. bearing on original roof structure; 3" by 5" beams at third points of rafters; 1823 roof intact below 1840 roof structure, 18" wood shakes with 5" exposed over ½" lime plaster on 1" wood sheathing; original roof framing of king post trusses at 6' - 0" o.c., 10 ¼" (vertical) by 7" (horizontal) rafters at midpoints between trusses are tied with collar beams at third points, mortise and iron construction with treenail, iron straps, and iron rodcotter pin fasteners; various graffiti in the garret include "Peter Folger 1830 May"; "Macy and Pitman, General Jobbers, 1894."

C. Description of the Interior:

1. Floor plans: Auditorium plan; interior spaces consist of a narthex

or vestibule, a sanctuary and chancel, balconies at side, rear balcony extended and enclosed as a worship space used during winter months; basement spaces created by modern excavation (not included in this survey).

- a. First Floor: Narthex provides access to sanctuary, modern stairway to basement spaces and balcony, early stairway to balcony closed by organ works at balcony floor level; sanctuary seating consists of four sections of compartmental pews with two center groups divided by longitudinal board partitions; chancel consists of step and railing, platform, pulpit, screen providing semi-privacy for choir and pianist, and organ serving as focal point of sanctuary; new doors and stairway at west end of sanctuary.
 - b. Balcony level: Balconies at each side of sanctuary; auditorium, kitchen and pantry at east and separated from sanctuary by glazed partition (see copy of undated photograph showing east balcony extending backwards from sanctuary-narthex partition).
 - c. Basement: New construction not included in this survey.
2. Stairways: None of importance except for remains of early stairway from narthex to balcony at southeast corner, 8 3/4" riser, 9 1/2" tread, square newel with bevel top, panel insert between rail and stringer.
 3. Flooring: Wood boards 12"- 21" wide painted grey, considerable patch work including plugs marking early position of pews; floors of pews at rear of sanctuary and side balconies sloped to accommodate sight lines.
 4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster applied directly to wood board partitions and rived or accordian wood lath; horizontal board wainscot; ceiling is curved at wall intersection; walls painted beige, ceiling and wainscot white;
 5. Doorways: None of importance.
 6. Decorative features and trim: Pews, book racks and candle shelves are of varied design dependant on tastes of individual occupants (see copy of old photograph showing stencil work on backs of pews), pews painted white, varnished wood trim, doors into pews at first floor level; balcony fascia appears to be modern construction.
 7. Notable hardware: Iron thumb latch operates wood bar pivoted opposite edge of door, moves in wood guide and wood keep; the organ is an Appleton Pipe Organ.

8. Lighting: Electric; sheet metal and wood pedestals with clusters of lights at top (modern); old photograph shows gas lights.
 9. Heating: Space heater in rear balcony space air conditioning in basement spaces, no heat in sanctuary (probably heated by coal stoves now removed); instant hotwater heater in kitchen off balcony (Sands No. 50 Cleveland, Ohio).
- D. Site: The Methodist Church faces east on Centre Street between Liberty Street and Rose Lane. Brick paving separates the building from Liberty Street, small green area between the building and brick paving at Centre Street, large elm trees; small green area to the west; asphalt of Rose Lane to the north. Other historical buildings in the vicinity include the Pacific National Bank, the Philip Folger Building, and the Masonic Lodge Building.

Prepared by F. Blair Reeves, AIA
Nantucket, Massachusetts
August 25, 1969

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were prepared as part of the 1969 Historic American Buildings Survey summer project on Nantucket, Massachusetts. This is the fourth project of a continuing HABS comprehensive survey of the early architecture and urban design of Nantucket financed by a grant from the Nantucket Historical Trust.

The project was under the general supervision of James C. Massey, Chief of the Historic American Buildings Survey. Project Director was Professor F. Blair Reeves, A.I.A., of the University of Florida. Student architects who assisted in the preparation of the measured drawings were John D. Davenport (Texas A & M University), Edward Bondi (University of Florida), R. Allen Eskew (Louisiana State University), and Roger H. Grunke (University of Florida). Historical information was provided by Mrs. Marie M. Coffin of Nantucket, Massachusetts. Photographs are by Jack E. Boucher of Linwood, New Jersey, and Cortlandt V. D. Hubbard of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The material was edited for deposit in the Library of Congress by Mrs. Constance Werner Ramirez, July 1971.